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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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FROM : AMCONGEN, Lagos, Nigeria.

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TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

DATE May 19, 1953

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SUBJECT: Recent Political Developments in Nigeria.

The Consulate General has delayed reporting on the most recent developments in Nigerian Politics until the return of the reporting officer from a tour of the Eastern Region, between May 6th and 15th. During this period and since the return of this officer two major crises have occurred in Nigeria, one of which constitutes a genuine threat to the peace and order of the Northern Region. The first critical action which took place was the fully expected dissolution of the Eastern House of Assembly on May 6th, which has almost completely stultified administration in the Region. The second, and more immediately critical, situation took place in Kano, Northern Nigeria, over the weekend of May 16th and 17th. Rioting began in the "strangers" settlements outside the walls on Saturday, touched off by a visit by S. L. AKINTOLA, Action Group bigwig, for the purpose of holding a political rally. The riots, brought finally under control Sunday evening, resulted in a death toll of forty and at least 200 injured. Within a very short time the violence had assumed purely tribal character, that is, Northerners and Southerners were killing each other without any question of political party or religion being asked. It should be noted that there has been no black versus white fighting at all and none is expected. To date this violence has not spread to any other Northern cities or to any other part of Nigeria, but the danger lies in the threat of violence throughout the North against the Southern minority scattered through the Region. The Western Region is still very quiet after a short session of the Western House of Assembly which passed a resolution in favor of Nigerian self-government in 1956 and voted in a Local Government Ordinance amended as previously suggested by the central Council of Ministers.

As previously reported, the tension between the North and the South (Eastern and Western Regions) has increased steadily since the end of the last session of the House of Representatives; and a major factor in this heightening of tension has been the intense "hate campaign" against the Northern leaders carried out by the Southern press, particularly the Action Group newspapers. Leaders of this

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of this party had been warned by several groups that it would be unwise to plan speaking tours of the North at this time, but with their usual lack of acumen and sense of responsibility, the party heads arranged for ex-Minister Akintola and his entourage to visit Kano. Kano authorities gave their permission for the political rally, feeling that they could probably handle any disturbance which might occur and not wishing to restrict, unnecessarily, the activities of Nigerian political parties. However, by Friday evening it was very obvious to the authorities that there would be difficulties too heavy to handle; the evidence was a sudden spurt of buying of machetes and iron bars by the local population. Permission for Akintola to speak was then withdrawn but he refused to cancel the rally. As he entered the compound where the rally was to be held, rioting broke out. By late Saturday night fair order had been restored, but special police and Nigerian troops had been brought into the area for reserves. Early Sunday morning violence broke out again and order was not restored until late Sunday. No final information is yet available as to the amount of property damage and looting involved, but the troops flown into Kano have not been employed to date. A state of emergency has been declared to exist and curfew and other regulations imposed.

The Northern House of Assembly began its session on May 18th, but adjourned for several days without taking any substantive action or carrying out any debate. It was felt that the members might prefer to return to their home districts in view of the present unrest in the Region, to continue the session at a future date when events were clarified. During the previous week the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), to which a majority of the House members belong, held a special meeting at which important resolutions were passed. At a closed meeting near Zaria the party declared that the North should limit relations with the other Regions to subjects of common interest, that the federal system of Nigeria should be made looser, that the House of Representatives should be dissolved and replaced by an advisory commission to advise the Governor on all-Nigerian matters, and that the North should have its own separate Civil Service controlled by the North alone. These declarations were published in the Southern press and are thought by the reporting officer and several responsible officials interviewed to be an accurate description of the meeting's findings. The seriousness of these declarations is obviously great, inasmuch as the NPC is the most influential party in the North and its members will probably introduce resolutions based on these points during the next meeting of the Northern House of Assembly. A clearer exposition of the points of view of the leaders of the North, and a large part of the populance, could not be found. There is no reason to believe that these attitudes are not held by a clear majority of the residents of Northern Nigeria.

Mr. AKintola

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Mr. Akintola and his primarily Yoruba-constituted entourage returned to Lagos on Sunday via a chartered aircraft at Government expense. Since his return the press has carried statements by him in regard to the riots; statements which are not accepted by the reporting officer as entirely true. It is the contention of Akintola, and his colleagues, that the riots are political in nature--violence between Northern supporters of self-government in 1956, on the one hand, and Northern "imperialist stooges" who wish to preserve British rule in Nigeria on the other hand. Reports of the rioting make it appear to this officer that the reciprocal killings and beatings are not being carried out on the basis of any political beliefs per se. It appears to be a case of mobs attacking anyone who was obviously of a tribe from the opposing section of the country, with the political aspects being a coincidental factor which has steadily grown in intensity. It is also clear that the continuing agitation of Akintola's point of view in the South will not operate to lessen the critical nature of the occurences, but can only intensify the inter-Regional ill-feeling.

There have been no serious outbreaks of violence in the Eastern Region as the result of the political instability existent in the area, although many officials feel that there may be more serious difficulties as time goes on. The House of Assembly was dissolved on the morning of May 6th, as had been expected since the British Government's Order-in-Council made such action possible--dissolution being upon the recommendation of the Regional Executive Councils. With a House which refused to act on any government bills during its last session, it was felt advisable to call for a reconstitution of the House, with a probable revision of the Council to follow. Prior to the dissolution, the NCNC majority took one more action to make the Regional government's operation difficult. The Government of the Region proposed the name of Mr. S. MUNA (Cameroons member of the House) as a minister in order to satisfy the statutory requirement that at least one member of the Executive Council must be from the British Cameroons; but the NCNCers refused to approve the appointment. This action had the incidental effect of alienating the majority of the Cameroons members of the House from the NCNC party and leading to a declaration from Dr. ENDELEY, Central Minister and a leader of the Kameruns United National Congress, that Cameroons voters must boycott the forthcoming Eastern Regional elections. These Cameroonians feel that the NCNC no longer represents their best interests, and that so long as this party controls the Eastern House they will not get any consideration; for this reason they are now asking for a separate Cameroons legislature.

Contrary to

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Contrary to the expectations of many House members who supported the dissolution, the dissolution of the legislature makes necessary new elections at all levels leading to House membership. It had been thought by many of these men that dissolution would only mean reconstitution of the House by the electoral colleges. Officials estimate that it may take as long as three months to prepare for the elections because of communications difficulties and popular inexperience with voting procedures, which means that at least four or five months will elapse before anything can be done about the present administrative inactivity throughout the Region. During the reporting officer's tour of the East it became very evident that the political situation has resulted in a serious paralysis of all levels of Regional government, with even the small towns suffering from completely inactive administrations. Prior to the adoption of the Local Government Ordinance in the East, it would have been possible for the District Officer, Residents and other British officials, to carry out the local governance, but under the new laws their authority is so limited as to make it impossible for them to do any but the most critical administrative work. The situation may call for revision of the local government laws to allow for at least temporary exercise of some of their former powers by non-Nigerian, non-elective officers.

It is generally felt that the NCNC stands a very good chance of returning at least a nominal majority to the House of Assembly at Enugu in the forthcoming elections. Many of the members of the recent House, in fact a majority, were not old-line NCNC party members when elected to the House but signed on the dotted line at Enugu just before the first meeting of the legislature. It is very likely that the majority of the electoral districts will send to the electoral colleges these same "favorite sons," or similar candidates chosen on tribal or family bases rather than party membership. The ultimate question, however, is how the intermediate electoral colleges will behave and how much control of candidates can be exercised by Zik at this point. The reporting officer feels that the new House will have much the same composition as the recently-dissolved one and that the NCNC should be able to gain a greater measure of control over the Regional executive than previously held. The possibility of disturbances arises from a growing resentment among the non-Ibo groups in the East of the obvious strengthening of Ibo-NCNC control of all levels of government. Many of these minority tribal groups have a deep-seated fear and mistrust of the Ibos and their party, the NCNC, and may not be willing to sit idly by while the Ibos and Zik extend their own control. The possibilities of trouble are, of course, much greater in the districts in which the non-Ibos are in the majority. Meanwhile, the entire Region is watchfully awaiting further developments.

The Western

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The Western House of Assembly held its second 1953 session from May 4th to 7th and adjourned without any contentious proceedings. Of interest is the fact that the President of the House during this session was a Nigerian, Mr. S. Ade OJO; the first Nigerian to serve as President of a Regional House under the new constitution. The session was also distinguished by the presence of Nigeria's first woman legislator, Mrs. AIYEDUN, who was appointed by the Lt. Governor at the behest of the Action Group shortly before the session began, and a Northern Moslem special member appointed to represent the Moslem community in the West. No strenuous debate occurred on a private member's motion to support self-government in 1956 and to commend the Western ex-Ministers for resigning their Lagos portfolios. Full and firm control of the House by Obafemi AWOLOWO and his Action Group accounted for the smooth passage of the resolutions; remembering that, at present, the Action Group and the NCNC are "collaborating" on this issue. The Local Government Bill also passed quickly and smoothly. A Lagos Local Government Bill was also passed and Awolowo announced that Lagos elections would be held on November 12, 1953--with all persons over 21 years of age eligible to vote and hold office. NCNC party members stated that they would not debate this bill, although they disagree with it, in the interests of Regional harmony. Actually, their opposition would have had almost no effect upon its passage because of their minority position in the House.

There has been some disturbance in Badagry, near Lagos, over the payment of increased taxes levied by the first 1953 meeting of the Western House of Assembly. The same sorts of disturbances have occurred in several areas of the Eastern Region on the question of taxes and indicate one of the problems which are going to face local governments as they attempt to carry out their health, welfare and education policies. While the members of the Regional legislatures may well realize the benefits to be gained from better education and medical care, the uneducated people in the villages cannot see the need for paying for them by way of increased taxes. The difficulty arises from the fact that general Government funds, Commonwealth funds, or missionary monies have previously been used to pay for most of these services, with no direct tax demands made for the purposes. It has proven a shock to these Nigerians to discover that they must now pay for the projects planned by their native political leaders out of their own earnings. Further, suspicion of improper use of funds collected, by elected local officials, have made the people chary of paying more taxes. It will take some time for the "man in the village" to get used to the idea of Nigerians paying their own bills with diminishing help from abroad.

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Out of all these occurrences it appears very likely that significant changes will have to be made in the present constitution for Nigeria. It has become very obvious that the Northern Region does not intend, and probably will not, to accept the pace of the march toward self-government envisioned and desired by the Eastern and Western Regions. It also appears that the Eastern Region is not making the transition to the new system as easily and quickly as they, and many others, felt they could. In the light of these facts, the reporting officer feels that a loosening of the federation of the three Regions will be necessary in order that each one may proceed toward self-government at a rate commensurate with its particular degree of readiness; rather than at a rate applicable to all of Nigeria at the same time.

Robert W. Ross
for Erwin P. Keeler
American Consul General